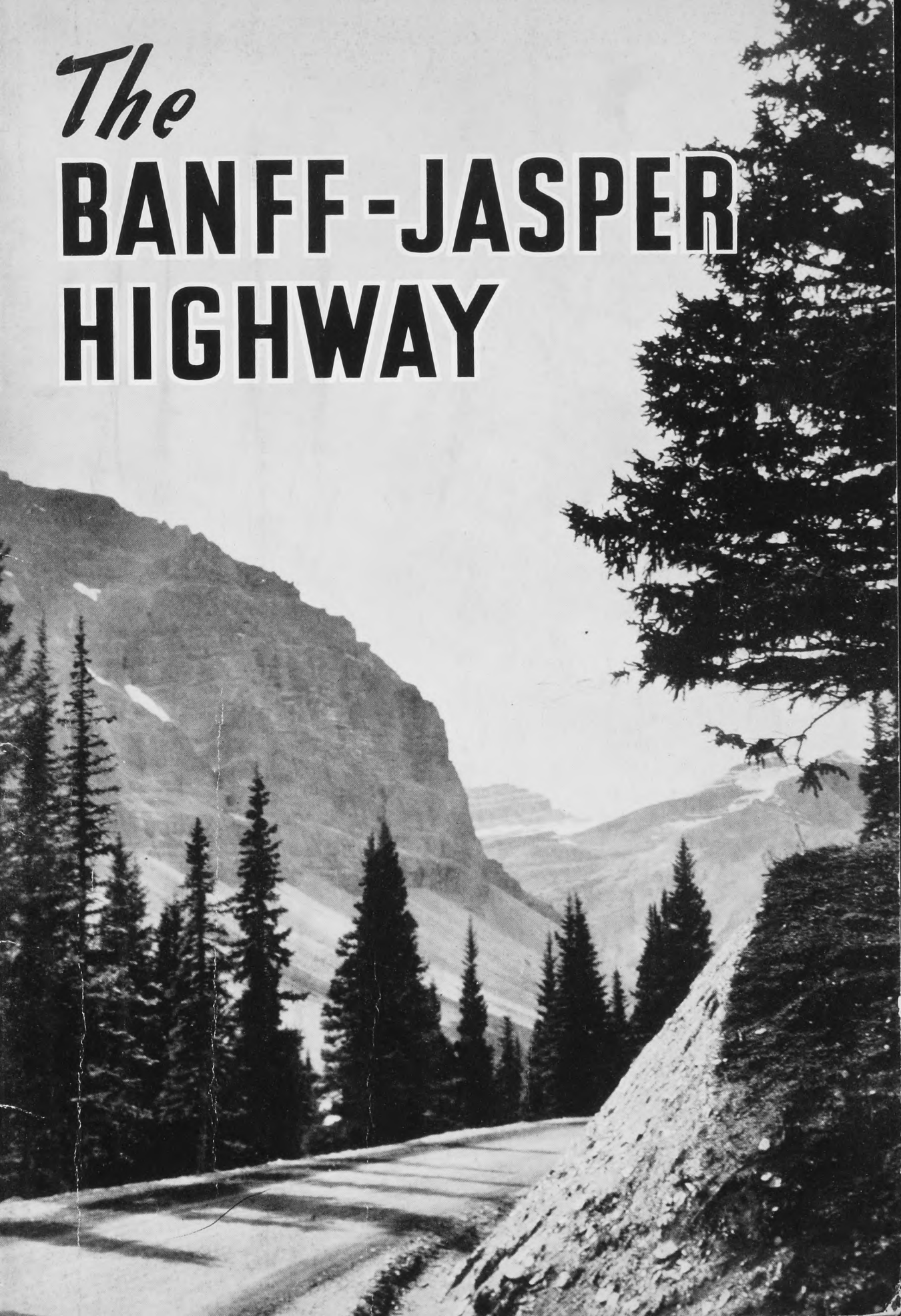


*The*  
**BANFF-JASPER  
HIGHWAY**







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# THE BANFF-JASPER HIGHWAY

by EDWARD E. BISHOP

(Reprinted from the Canadian Geographical Journal)

MOUNTAIN highways have always possessed a peculiar fascination for mankind. It is not only the wealth of scenery which they command, or the rarefied atmosphere to which they ascend, that tingles unusual human emotions; it is something more than that. It is a sense of penetration of the unknown, of overcoming obstacles which for ages have been barriers to human progress. It is not by chance that mountains and rivers constitute the boundaries of states in the Old World.

The development of Canada as a confederation has been associated from the very first with the penetration of mountain barriers. When the final spike was driven on the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the ends of the Dominion were linked together in fact as well as in symbol. The completion of the Canadian Northern Railway to Vancouver, and of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway to Prince Rupert, were additional chains in an iron tie of which Canadian enterprise and engineering may well be proud.

More recently, with the progress of invention, has come the automobile highway, penetrating the Rocky Mountains at various points, particularly into the hearts of national parks, as at Banff, Jasper, Waterton Lakes, Kootenay and Yoho. Gradually, broad and safe highways have been bringing the charm of these mountain areas within the reach of every motorist. But until this time Banff, oldest of the national parks, and Jasper, largest of the national parks, although adjoining each other, have been separated by a sea of mountains impenetrable except by saddle-horse and pack-train.

Each park has long been developing its own highways, but it was not until recent years that a plan to connect the two systems by an automobile road — not *across* the Rockies but *along* the Rockies — took definite form. Construction of the inter-park highway began in 1931, and, according to present expectations a good road for motor-cars will be open all the way from Banff to Jasper, or vice versa, by the end of June, 1940.

The Town of Banff, headquarters of the national park of the same name, located some 85 miles west of Calgary, with which

it is connected by a good all-weather road, may be regarded as the starting point of the Banff-Jasper Highway. The townsite, lying in the valley of the Bow River and surrounded by impressive mountains, is truly alpine in appearance. Banff is a Mecca of tourists from all parts of the world.

Most visitors will make the trip in their own cars, but those who come by rail, or for other reasons are dependent upon public services, can engage cars or bus accommodation at Banff, or, if travelling the opposite way, at Jasper.

The road leaves Banff at an altitude of approximately 4,500 feet and makes a gentle ascent up the beautiful Bow Valley toward Lake Louise. Points of scenic splendour and inviting side-trips pass with almost every mile: Johnston Canyon, 16 miles from Banff and a short distance to the right of the highway; four miles further on the junction with the Banff-Windermere Highway leading down through Kootenay National Park to Kingsgate and the United States; Lake Louise Station, 37 miles from Banff, with the world-famous Lake Louise a mile high mirroring the ice-colours of Victoria Glacier about three miles distant on the left. Thus far we have been travelling a road which will become part of the Trans-Canada Highway to Vancouver, but a short distance before reaching Lake Louise Station we turn right on to the Banff-Jasper Highway proper, and continue the ascent of the Bow Valley almost due north, with Waputik Range and Hector Lake on the west, and Mount Hector to the east.

Bow Lake, source of the Bow River, is one of the many gems strung on this highway which threads the eastern throat of the Rockies. Its setting is superb, with snow-capped peaks rising high on three sides, and Bow Glacier, which has its source in the Wapta Ice-field, flowing down at its western end. From Bow Lake the road climbs through a broad alpine meadow to the summit of Bow Pass (6,878 feet), from which point it descends into the Mistaya River Valley by easy grades, piercing magnificent stands of original timber. Glimpses of Peyto Glacier, farthest source of the Mistaya, are com-

Left:—Mount Victoria and Glacier mirrored in beautiful Lake Louise, Banff National Park.

Front Cover:—The Banff-Jasper Highway near Bow Lake, Banff National Park.



On the Saskatchewan Glacier, largest of the great 'rivers of ice' to issue from the Columbia Ice-field, Banff National Park.

manded from points of vantage along this stretch.

The highway continues down the Mistaya River Valley past Mistaya and Waterfowl Lakes, which glisten like blue jewels in the emerald setting of surrounding forests. As it skirts Waterfowl Lakes the road passes within view of Mount Chephren (10,715 feet), a great pyramid of rock, before cutting along the base of Mount Murchison (10,936 feet) to the valley of the North Saskatchewan River, which is bridged just below its junction with the Mistaya. Here is the confluence of the three main sources of the North Saskatchewan. Most important of these is the North Fork, coming in from the north; next, and almost as large, is the Howse River, which comes in from the west and southwest, and was once known as the Middle Fork. The Mistaya, formerly known as the South Fork or Bear Creek, joins the others from the south after passing through a remarkable canyon which is accessible by trail from the highway.

Proceeding northward, the motorist will drive along the flats below the mighty wall of Mount Wilson (10,631 feet). Here a series of practically vertical cliffs, some

reaching 2,000 feet above the highway, stretch for almost ten miles. From certain points one may count as many as twelve waterfalls on this mountain, any of which, in a setting of less profuse grandeur, would be considered a feature of outstanding interest. The Alexandra River, which comes in at right angles from the west, opens a wide valley to disclose at its headwaters the impressive peaks of the Great Divide. An entrance to the huge Columbia Ice-field is by way of the Alexandra River and thence by the Castleguard River, a distance of some 25 miles from the junction of the Alexandra and North Saskatchewan Rivers. Passing Graveyard Campsite, for the next eight or nine miles the road lies between well-defined mountains; Mount Saskatchewan (10,964 feet), with its numerous shoulders and lesser peaks, completely fills the space to the west, and sheer cliffs of Mounts Coleman and Cirrus constitute the eastern wall of the valley. Waterfalls, fed by hidden lakes and glaciers above the cliffs, cascade for hundreds of feet down the precipitous mountainside.

Ascending from the North Saskatchewan Valley is a climb which has been known for years as the "Big Hill", present-



ing an abrupt rise of over 1,000 feet. The old pack trail accomplished this sudden change in elevation by angling sharply up the mountainside, which at this point is so steep that horses could hardly climb the trail. The new highway overcomes the difficulty by a traverse around the shoulder of Mount Athabaska and several long, flat switchbacks ascending steadily to the higher altitudes; then around the eastern edge of Mount Athabaska and so on to the top of Sunwapta Pass (6,675 feet). Although it actually crosses the Atlantic-Arctic watershed, the ascent of this pass is so gradual on both sides that difficulty is found in telling just where is the summit. However, cairns indicating the boundary between Banff and Jasper National Parks help to show the highest point. Jasper Town is now just 69 miles distant.

The motorist now finds himself in a veritable sea of the great mountains of the Rockies. To the right rises Nigel Peak, (10,535 feet); to the left, Mount Athabaska, (11,452 feet); westward from Mount Athabaska, Snow Dome, in the great Columbia Ice-field, (11,340 feet); westward from that again, and following close to the boundary of Jasper National

Park, which is also at this point the boundary between the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, tower Mount Columbia, (12,294 feet), and Mount King Edward, (11,400 feet). Another ice-capped peak, Mount Kitchener, (11,500 feet), rears its white crown forward and to the left.

Snow Dome is literally the roof of the continent, for here meet the watersheds of the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Arctic. Moisture precipitated on the top of Snow Dome may follow any one of three courses: down the Athabaska Glacier to the Sunwapta River, thence into the Athabaska and eventually to the Arctic; down the Saskatchewan Glacier into the North Saskatchewan, eventually arriving in Hudson Bay and the Atlantic Ocean; or westward into Rice Brook and the Bush River, which empties into the mighty Columbia, and so to the Pacific.

The highway approaches to within a few hundred feet of Athabaska Glacier. Hemmed in between Snow Dome and Mount Athabaska, this river of ice flows out of the Columbia Ice-field on the skyline for a distance of about four miles to its tongue, where it melts to become the

Riders at Bow Lake; Bow Glacier and Mount Thompson in background, Banff National Park.





The broad tongue of Athabasca Glacier lies within a few hundred yards of the highway, Jasper National Park.

source of the Sunwapta River. From the point where it leaves the ice-field to the tongue the glacier drops about 3,000 feet.

The motorist will undoubtedly want to get out and actually walk on the ice, which can be done without hazard, for although the glacier is badly seamed and crevassed farther up it is fairly smooth near the tongue. Walled in between the black rock cliffs of Mount Athabaska and the Snow Dome, this slow-descending body of ice presents a grim but beautiful sight. As the road is at an elevation near timberline there is no forest growth to obscure the awe-inspiring majesty of ice and rock.

Such is the closest point on the highway to the huge Columbia Ice-field, the largest body of ice south of the Arctic Circle. Estimated to be anything up to 2,000 feet thick, the ice-cap of the continent extends over an area of approximately 150 square miles.

Getting on to the ice-field proper is a job for the climber, rather than the hiker or rider, for to traverse safely the length of the Athabaska Glacier requires a climbing rope and axes. In the spring and early summer, up to the middle of July, skis can be used to advantage. The climbing of the

ice-field takes the alpinist from his usual environment of rock and trees and earth to an entirely new world of snow and ice. Here he must thread his way among huge crevasses and sink-holes, some of which are so wide that a large building could be lost in their cavernous depths, and some so deep that objects dropped into them cannot be heard to strike the bottom.

Once off the glacier and on the ice-field, the scene changes again. The crevasses are few and far between. The smooth, snow-covered surface of the ice stretches mile after mile in undulating rolls. Completely circling the ice-field is a row of mighty peaks. Entirely snow-clad on the ice-field side, they afford no relief to the eye from the pristine whiteness of the foreground. There is no dust up here, so the snow is always white. Only through gaps in the encircling mountains can the black and blues of many distant summits be seen.

Of the 21 highest peaks in the Canadian Rockies, 11 are in the immediate vicinity of this ice-field. Ascents of several, such as Snow Dome and Kitchener, can be made on skis, even in midsummer.



Lac Beauvert, Jasper National Park.

Descending from an elevation high above the boiling canyon of the Sunwapta by a series of switchbacks, the road drops several hundred feet in the next two miles. To the left rises the sheer walls of Mount Kitchener and the noble crown of Mount Stutfield, (11,320 feet), its rounded top capped by a covering of ice about 400 feet thick. Its appearance suggests a huge round cake with white icing, sliced down the centre. Mounts Woolley and Diadem, both over 11,000 feet, succeed each other in the rapidly-changing and magnificent panorama, and to the right is Tangle Ridge, which, to the traveller coming the opposite way, presents a forbidding bluff that seems to bar all further progress.

The tourist now swings into easy going along the Sunwapta Valley, which gradually broadens before him. At Sunwapta Falls a side-road permits a short drive to a thundering cataract in the Sunwapta River. From here, also, a trail penetrates up the Athabaska and Chaba Rivers to command the stark beauty of Fortress Lake, a seven-mile body of water in a region of sheer walls and beetling crags. Its eastern tip just touches the Divide, while

its western outlet feeds the Wood River, flowing into the Columbia.

About two miles west of Sunwapta Falls the Sunwapta River joins the Athabaska, under which name it courses all the way to Jasper Town, and beyond. Continuing down the highway for another fifteen miles the motorist crosses the Athabaska River at the roaring Athabaska Falls, and is now within about twenty miles of Jasper. This is a point of such compelling beauty that he will stop his car to linger in admiration. A little later he crosses the Whirlpool River, a tributary of the Athabaska, where a sign indicates, "Trail to Athabaska Pass and the Committee's Punchbowl." Should he have the curiosity of the explorer and the energy of the hiker he may follow this trail thirty miles up the Whirlpool River. It will lead him to a pass across the Great Divide that was once the main route used by the old fur brigades on their way from the prairies to the Pacific Coast. The Committee's Punchbowl is a small lake on the very summit of the pass from which water flows out at both ends; from one end reaching the Pacific Ocean, and from the other, the Arctic. This was the historic





Wild flowers bloom at high altitudes; dryas on slope of Mount Wilcox opposite Mount Athabaska and Glacier, Jasper National Park.

meeting place for the brigades from the West and from the East.

Flanked by mountains on either side, the visitor continues down the Whirlpool and Athabaska Rivers until he finds himself on the smooth flats of a wide valley, driving along a perfectly level road lined with poplars and evergreens. About eight miles from Jasper he joins the spectacular road coming down from Angel Glacier and Mount Edith Cavell, and follows a pleasant, winding course to Jasper Town, altitude 3,472 feet, headquarters of the largest national park in North America, and a holiday resort of world-wide renown.

Not only does the new highway command some of the finest mountain scenery in the world, but by uniting two of Canada's greatest national parks it brings Banff within 186 miles of Jasper instead of 511 miles by existing automobile routes. The connection with Banff establishes, also, connection with the great highway systems of Canada and the United States. With the opening of the Trans-Canada Highway around the Big Bend of the Columbia River, which will probably take place at or about the same time as the official opening of the Banff-Jasper Highway, an all-Canadian route to Vancouver will provide a channel for motor traffic, not only from the British Columbia metropolis, but from all the populous areas of the Pacific States. And it adds to all itineraries the charm of alternative routes.

The road has been built by the Surveys and Engineering Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources in conjunction with the Lands, Parks and Forests Branch of the same Department. In spite of the wild country through which it passes the highway has none of the terrors sometimes associated with mountain roads. It consists mainly of long, straight stretches and easy grades. Changes in direction are accomplished by means of smooth, sweeping curves rather than sharp corners. The minimum road width is 18 feet, but the actual travel way is generally wider, especially on curves. The average maximum grade is eight per cent, and it does not reach ten per cent anywhere. Climatic conditions, it is expected, will permit tourist use of the highway in normal seasons from the 1st of June until the 15th of October.

Facilities for the travelling public are rapidly being provided. A modern chalet has been constructed at Bow Lake, 24 miles from Lake Louise Junction, where

meals and sleeping accommodation can be had. Meals and accommodation can also be obtained at a modern chalet at Athabaska Glacier, 66 miles from Jasper. There are auto bungalow camps at Johnston's Canyon, Castle Mountain, Lake Louise, and, of course, at Banff and Jasper. Auto bungalow camps are also under construction close to the crossing of the Saskatchewan River in Banff National Park and at Whistler Creek, three miles from the town of Jasper, in Jasper National Park. Public camp-grounds are located at Johnston's Canyon, 16 miles west of Banff; Castle Mountain, 20 miles west of Banff; and at Lake Louise, as well as at the towns of Banff and Jasper. Additional camp-grounds are being provided at Mosquito Creek, 53 miles; Bow Summit, 64 miles; Waterfowl Lake, 74 miles from Banff; and at a point three miles north of the North Saskatchewan bridge. There also is one to be constructed on the banks of the Mistaya River near the Saskatchewan, 86 miles from Banff. Picnic grounds with outdoor fire-places are available at Sunwapta Falls and Athabaska Falls, in Jasper Park.

Thus opens a new page in the development of Canada and a new channel for tourist travel, not only for Canadians, but for the people of the United States, and all other well-disposed neighbours who come to share it. From the luxury of the modern motor-car breath-taking majesty is revealed in unbroken but ever-changing panorama. The highway not only commands much of the finest mountain scenery in the world, but because its entire length lies in national parks, which are game sanctuaries, the opportunity to see the native fauna of the district, from the sure-footed mountain goat to the grim and strictly unsocial grizzly bear, is greater than perhaps in any similar area elsewhere. The altitude is high enough to provide the brilliance and the exhilaration associated with the mountains, and yet not so high as to present a problem to those of normal health and physique. Everywhere lies the wilderness, unchanged and unspoiled; yet nowhere is the visitor an hour's drive from the comforts and resources of modern civilization.

The new highway unites Canada's greatest national parks. But that is merely a symbol of its service. Its appeal to the traveller, the nature-student, and the lover of the out-of-doors, is universal; in them it unites, not merely parks, but peoples and nations.





Near Bow Lake the icy talons of Crowfoot Glacier cling to sheer rock walls, Banff National Park.

Right:—Mount Chephren, named after the second of the three great pyramids of Egypt, rises high above Upper Waterfowl Lake, Banff National Park.







Bow Lake looking south; Bow Peak and Crowfoot Glacier in background, Banff National Park.

Looking north up Mistaya River Valley from Peyto Lookout; Peyto Lake in foreground, Banff National Park.







Saskatchewan River Crossing, below the confluence of the Mistaya, Howse, and North Saskatchewan Rivers; Kaufmann Peaks and Mount Sarbach in background, Banff National Park.

Junction of Alexandra and North Saskatchewan Rivers; shoulder of Mount Amery on left, Banff National Park.



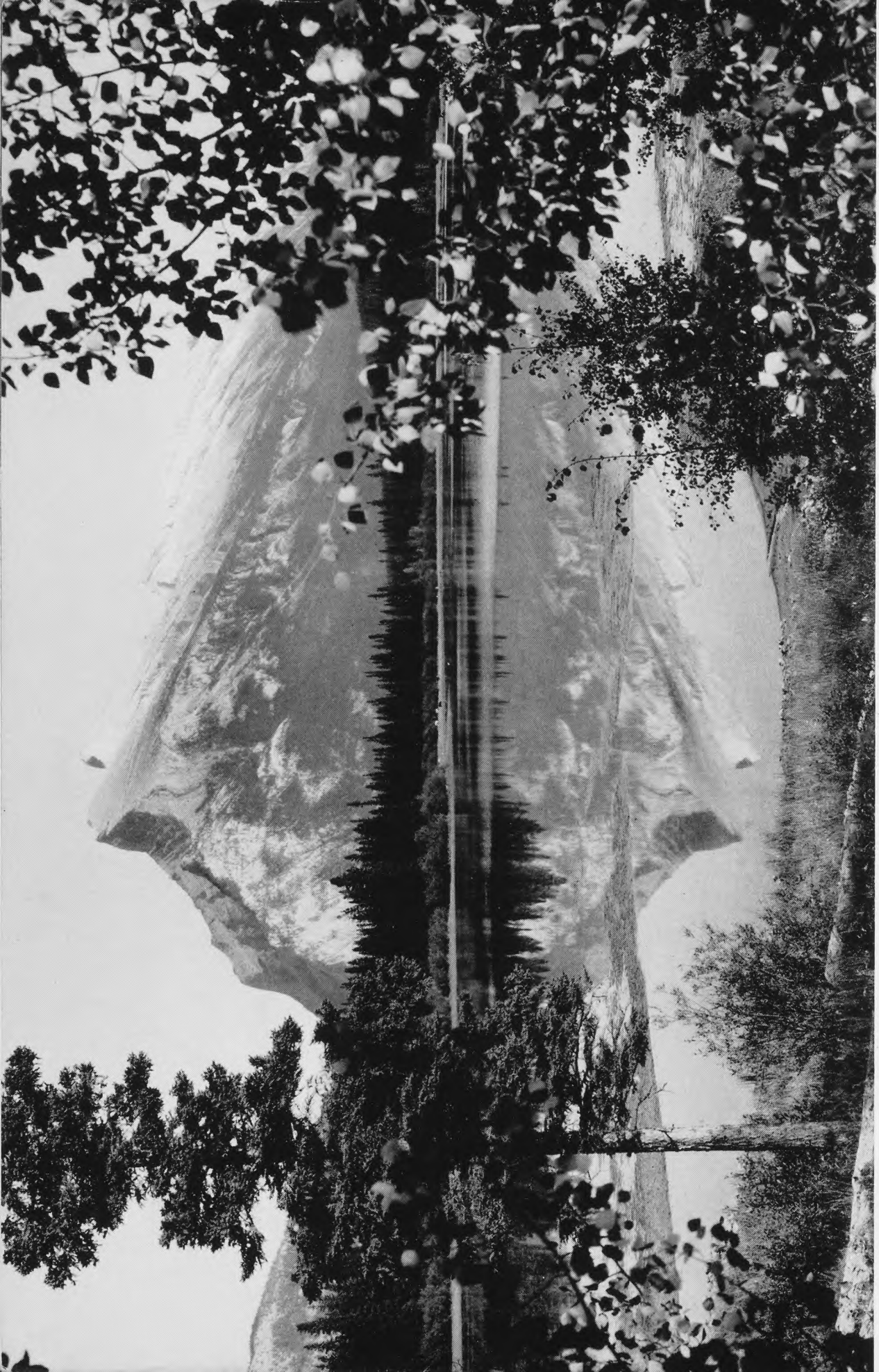






Mount Kerkeslin and Whirlpool River, Jasper National Park.



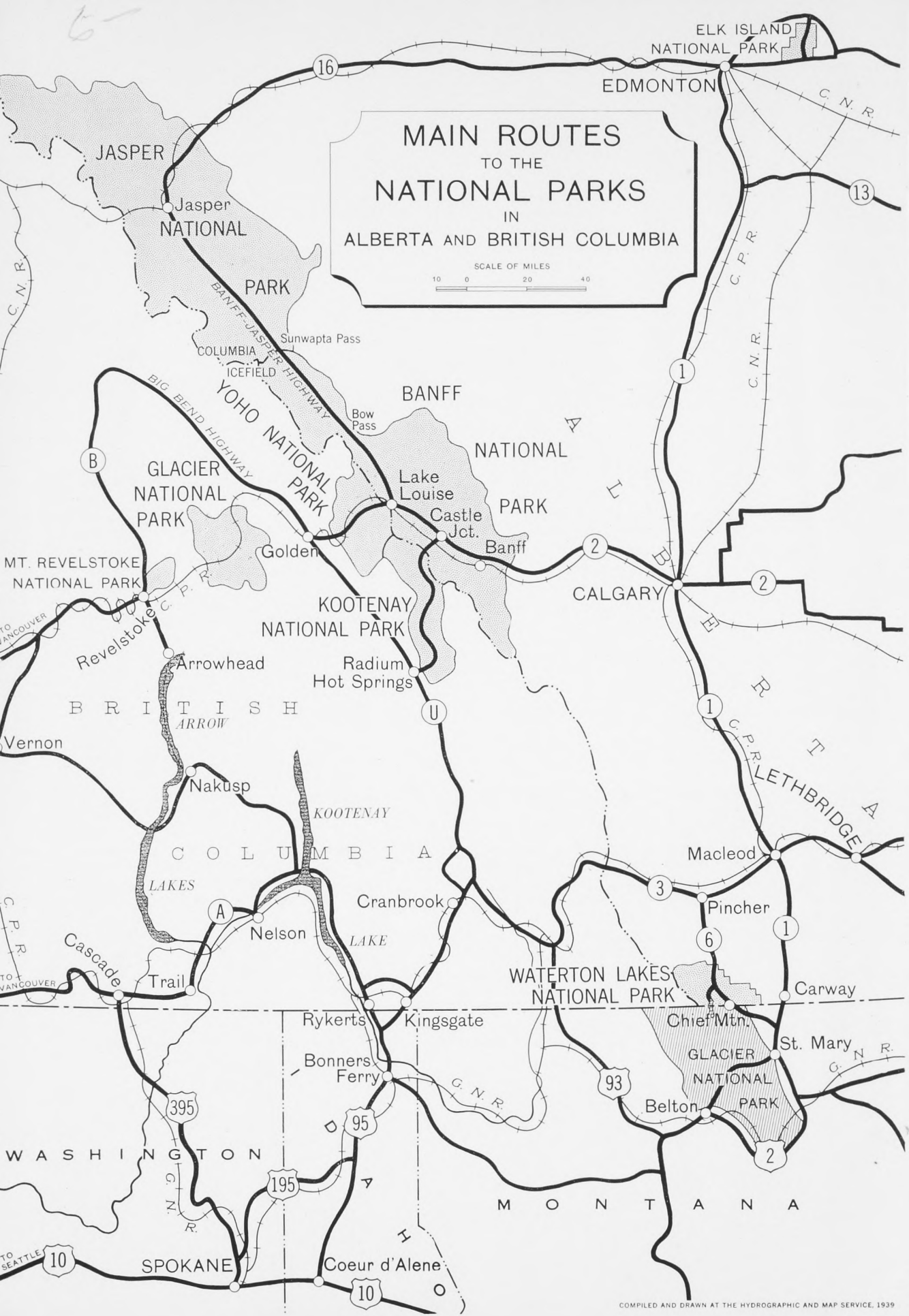


Mount Rundle and Vermilion Lake from Banff-Lake Louise Highway, Banff National Park.





Headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River, Mount Saskatchewan on left, Saskatchewan Glacier and Columbia Ice-field in right background, Banff National Park.





# THE NATIONAL PARKS OF CANADA

(Nineteen in number, with a total area of 12,403 square miles)

1. **Banff, Alberta.**—Mountain playground, typical example of Central Rockies. Massive ranges, ice-fields, and glaciers. Contains famous resorts, Banff and Lake Louise. Winter sports centre. Big game sanctuary. Established 1885; area, 2,585 square miles.
2. **Buffalo, Alberta.**—Fenced area originally set aside for the preservation of buffalo and other big game. Animal population since withdrawn; principal preserve now at Elk Island National Park. Established 1908; area, 197.5 square miles.
3. **Cape Breton Highlands, Nova Scotia.**—Typical example of rugged coast-line of Cape Breton Island with mountain background. Remarkable seascapes visible from motor road. Established 1936; area, approximately 390 square miles.
4. **Elk Island, Alberta.**—Fenced preserve containing a large herd of buffalo; also deer, elk, and moose. Recreational and camping area. Established 1911; area, 51.2 square miles.
5. **Fort Anne, Nova Scotia.**—National Historic Park at Annapolis Royal. Site of early Acadian settlement of Port Royal. Historical museum. Established 1917; area, 31 acres.
6. **Fort Beauséjour, New Brunswick.**—National Historic Park near Sackville. Site of French fort erected prior to 1755. Historical museum. Established 1926; area, 59 acres.
7. **Georgian Bay Islands, Ontario.**—Thirty islands in Georgian Bay archipelago. Recreational area. Unique limestone formations and caves on Flowerpot Island. Established 1929; area, 5.37 square miles.
8. **Glacier, British Columbia.**—Superb example of Selkirk Mountain region. Snow-capped peaks, glaciers, luxuriant forests, alpine flora, and subterranean caves. Established 1886; area, 521 square miles.
9. **Jasper, Alberta.**—Largest national park in North America. Contains immense region of majestic peaks, ice-fields, broad valleys and beautiful lakes, and includes the famous resort, Jasper. Big game sanctuary, and alpine playground. Established 1907; area, 4,200 square miles.
10. **Kootenay, British Columbia.**—Mountain park enclosing Vermilion-Sinclair section of Banff-Windermere Highway. Deep canyons, remarkable valleys, hot mineral springs. Established 1920; area 587 square miles.
11. **Mount Revelstoke, British Columbia.**—Alpine plateau formed by summit of Mount Revelstoke on western slope of Selkirk Mountains. Reached by spectacular motor highway. Established 1914; area, 100 square miles.
12. **Nemiskam, Alberta.**—Fenced preserve containing a herd of prong-horned antelope. Established 1922; area, 8.5 square miles.
13. **Point Pelee, Ontario.**—Most southerly mainland point in Canada. Recreational area with remarkable beaches and unique flora. Resting place for migratory birds. Established 1918; area, 6.04 square miles.
14. **Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.**—Forested lakeland of northwestern Canada. Remarkable water highway system. Interesting fauna. Summer resort and recreational area. Established 1927; area, 1,869 square miles.
15. **Prince Edward Island.**—Coast-line strip twenty-five miles in length on north shore of Prince Edward Island. Recreational area with fine beaches. Established 1937; area, approximately 7 square miles.
16. **Riding Mountain, Manitoba.**—Rolling woodland, with crystal lakes, on summit of Manitoba escarpment. Big game sanctuary. Summer resort and recreational area. Established 1929; area, 1,148 square miles.
17. **St. Lawrence Islands, Ontario.**—Mainland reservation and thirteen islands among the "Thousand Islands" of St. Lawrence River. Recreational areas. Established 1914; area, 185.6 acres.
18. **Waterton Lakes, Alberta.**—Canadian section, Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Mountain playground of unusual charm on east slope of Rockies. Fine motor drives and trails. Varied flora and fauna. Established 1895; area, 220 square miles.
19. **Yoho, British Columbia.**—Rugged scenery on west slope of Rockies. Famed Yoho Valley with numerous waterfalls, Kicking Horse Valley, Emerald and O'Hara Lakes. Established 1886; area, 507 square miles.

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*Additional information concerning the National Parks of Canada may be obtained from the National Parks Bureau, Lands, Parks and Forests Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, Ottawa, Canada.*

*(Printed in Canada)*

*Back Cover:*—Athabaska River Canyon below Athabaska Falls; Mount Kerkeslin in background, Jasper National Park.

